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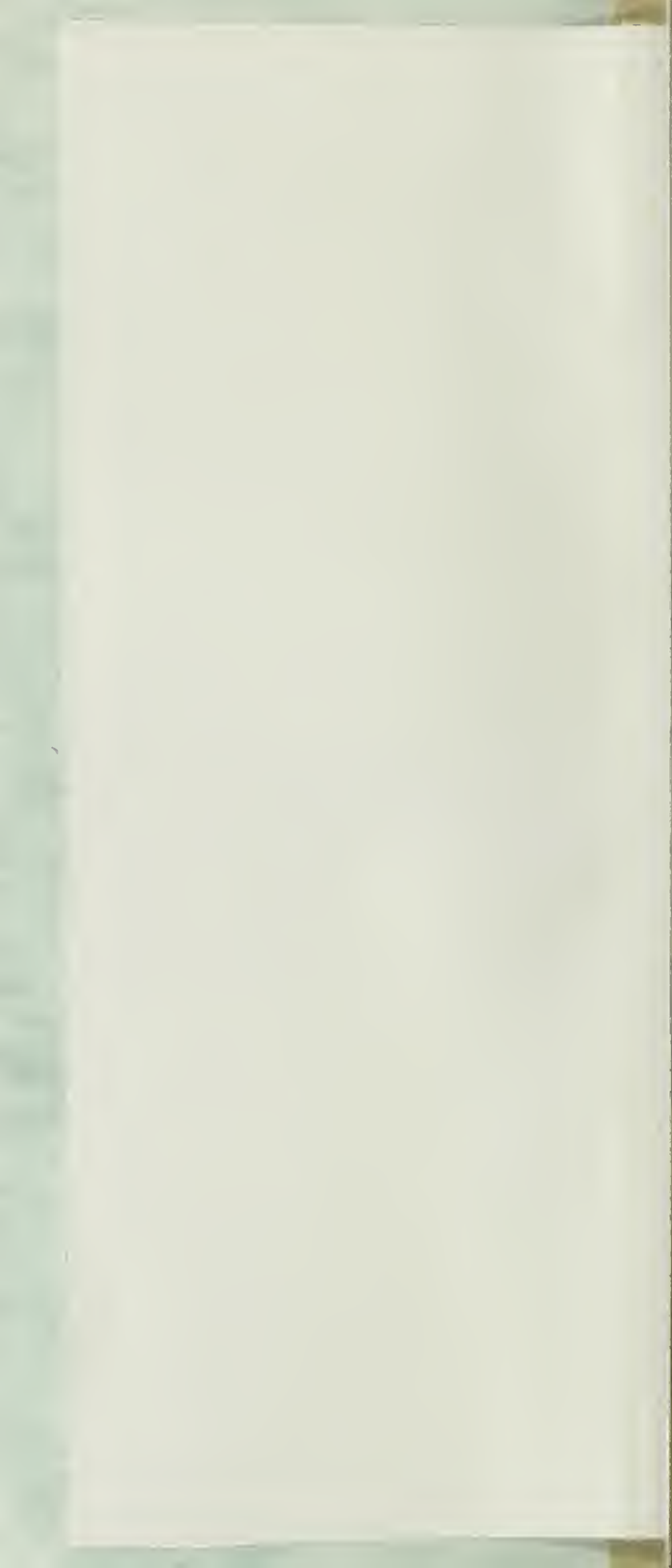
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Selecting Books for School-Age Children

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Books for a child's own bookshelf should be chosen thoughtfully because his books are important to him. Many will be read again and again; others will be kept at hand because of some deep feeling about the book. Only a few will be read and discarded.

Whether to select beautiful and expensive editions or to spread the book budget over a greater number of less-handsome books depends on the individual child. Some children are more sensitive than others to the beauty of a book or its illustrations. Some children just like the feel of a book. Others hardly seem to notice the way a book is made — the story is all that interests them.

Children differ in their reading needs and interests, just as they grow and develop differently and do not reach the same stage of development at the same time. The following suggestions for selecting books should be used merely as a guide and not as a set of hard and fast rules.

Kindergarten and primary school years (5-7)

Going to school means wider horizons in a more socialized setting. Interest in picture books continues, but may now center on people. The child likes realistic stories about his immediate world of home, school, and community; stories about real-life children; about a street like the one the child lives on; about the farm; about supermarkets; about railroad trips. Simple stories about magic and nonsense, humor, adventure, and poetry are also of interest at this age.

Intermediate years (7-10)

The range of interest is now wider and the span of attention is longer. Interest is now in longer stories or books about people and customs outside the immediate environment — regional stories, stories about other lands, historical and folk tales. Realistic stories about boys and girls in which adults play a part and with a relatively complicated plot are favorites.

Interests of boys and girls now show some differences. Boys are likely to prefer books about boys, adventure stories, masculine sport stories, science narratives, biographies, and histories. Girls tend to prefer stories about other girls, mild mysteries, fantasies, and adventure stories about girls.

Preadolescence (10-12)

Specialized interests become more defined. Boys are interested in sports stories, westerns, and biographies of athletes, aviators, and similar hero figures.

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Girls turn to romantic junior novels, biographies of women, junior etiquette books, books about girls like themselves, and romantic career novels. Both boys and girls enjoy stories of myths and legends.

Adolescence (13 and over)

Teens may be physically mature but lack adult experience. They are idealistic, striving to understand the world around them and to find a place for themselves in that world.

Books that deal with moral and philosophical problems and with social questions are of interest now. Boys particularly are likely to be interested in pure science. Reading interests and tastes of both boys and girls are largely at the adult level, but both still need books that help bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood — books on understanding themselves and others, on college life, and on careers.

Children's book sets

Quite different kinds of book sets are available for both pleasure and information. Some offer varied collections of stories or verse, along with suggestions for arts and crafts and play activities. Reference sets or encyclopedias are especially valuable during the learning years.

Before buying a book set, parents need to have clearly in mind what they want the set of books to do for a child. Parents need to remember that they will want to buy other books as well, to meet their children's changing needs and interests.

Book clubs and libraries

Book clubs that make a careful selection of books offer a valuable service. They bring new books to the young reader throughout the year.

Not all the books that boys and girls want to read need to be bought. Young people can be helped to learn how to make full use of the public library, the school library, or the bookmobile.

Guides to book selection

Here are some qualities to look for in a book when selecting for school-age children. They have been adapted from criteria developed by the Child Study Association of America.

Sincerity. Children's books should take the young reader seriously, neither talking down to him nor over his head to the knowing adults. The author must put into his story the ring of truth. He must convince the reader that he believes in his story and understands the subject.

Authenticity. A sense of time and place is essential. Historical stories and biographies based on real characters and events, while they may take liberties with the dialogue, must be authentic, as far as the facts are known. Unsavory and gruesome details are sometimes essential to the story, but should be tempered to the age of the expected child reader.

Credibility. Plot and characterization must be convincing and the motivation believable. Even in fantasy and science fiction, the premise and plot development must be credible, once the setting has been accepted.

Emotional impact. Books whose emotional impact may come close to children's own lives, whether as fantasy or reality, need to be suited to the maturity of the intended reader.

Writing style. This should be good within the standards of its area. It need not be great or literary, but it must effectively present its material, plot, and characters.

Reader interest. The book should have sustained interest and reader appeal. Of course, no book can be expected to appeal to all readers within a given age group.

Age suitability. Often an age range is given in children's books or on the display shelf. Use this merely as a reference point, for children vary widely in their capacity and interest at any given age.


SELECT BOOKS WITH THESE POINTS IN MIND

- Select for the particular child and his special interests.
- Consider the education and information available in the book.
- Evaluate the variety of the story content.
- Consider the appearance and color of the book.

This circular was prepared by John A. Shultz, Assistant Professor of Family Life Extension.

Cooperative Extension Work, University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating. JOHN B. CLAAR, Director. Acts approved by Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914.





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